

<b>Key Decision Required:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>In the Forward Plan:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
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## CABINET

29<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020

### REPORT OF THE HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER

#### A.4 **HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2020-2024** (Report prepared by Peter Russell)

#### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

##### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To adopt a new Homelessness Reduction & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 for the District.

##### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Local authorities are required by Government to have a formal homelessness strategy and are expected to adopt a strategic approach to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in their local areas and plan for future needs.

The strategy identifies four key strategic priorities to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the district as follows:

- Earlier Intervention and Education
- Better Partnership and Holistic Working
- Increasing the Supply of Suitable Accommodation
- Exploring New Ways to Prevent and Tackle Rough Sleeping

##### **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

It is recommended that Cabinet :

1. **Adopts the Homelessness Reduction & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-24 and its accompanying Delivery Plan set out in Appendix 1 of the strategy and;**
2. **Delegates authority to the Housing Portfolio Holder to make amendments to the strategy, if needed, after it is adopted.**

#### PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

##### **DELIVERING PRIORITIES**

The strategy will contribute to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan 2020-2024:

**Community Leadership Through Partnerships**

The strategy focusses on the need to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping earlier in partnership with other agencies. This will improve housing opportunities and health and well-being outcomes for clients at risk of homelessness.

### **Building Sustainable Communities for the Future**

The strategy will contribute to increasing the supply of accommodation in all sectors of the market. The provision of better quality accommodation will improve the health and well-being and educational prospects of some of the District's most vulnerable residents.

## **FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK**

### **Finance and other resources**

#### ***Temporary accommodation provision.***

The primary cost in tackling homelessness is the cost of making temporary accommodation available. Temporary accommodation placements for homeless households have increased over recent years. In 2013/14 temporary accommodation placements cost the Council £22,368 whereas by 2018/19 the cost had increased to £459,265. Unless the Council uses its own housing stock the cost of temporary accommodation over that covered by Housing Benefit subsidy is met by the General Fund.

The table below shows the level of spend on temporary accommodation in recent years.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Spend</b>
2013/14	£22,368
2014/15	£71,382
2015/16	£103,308
2016/17	£204,028
2017/18	£335,947
2018/19	£459,265

With homelessness levels showing no signs of reducing (both nationally and locally) temporary accommodation costs can only be reduced by the Council using its own housing stock or securing less expensive accommodation. Using our own housing stock is not supported by those on the Housing Register as they feel that homeless households are queue jumping.

Research in this area concludes that the need for temporary accommodation is unlikely to reduce. A report published by Shelter in August 2017 entitled *Homelessness projections: Core homelessness in Great Britain* suggested that if current policies remain unchanged the most acute forms of homelessness are likely to continue rising.

During the week commencing 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019 there were 77 properties for rent within a five mile radius of Clacton and 35 around the Harwich area. To put those figures into context during that week there were 337 open homelessness applications. Of those applications 99 were currently homeless and 77 were threatened with homelessness in the next 56 days. Rising rents in this area, with a forecast three per cent rise every year for the next five years, combined with landlords selling property means that supply will become more restricted. An article in "This is Money" published in May 2019 reported on a wide ranging study of almost 2,500 landlords by the Residential Landlords Association. It found that a quarter of private landlords are looking to sell at least one property over the next year.

The Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 states that it is unlawful for councils to accommodate families with children in Bed and Breakfast (or

accommodation with shared facilities) for longer than six weeks. In 2018/19 we had 31 families who were placed for over six weeks in bed and breakfast type accommodation.

The Council has for many years adopted a pro-active preventative approach to reducing homelessness. However, the last five years has seen a national increase in homelessness that has also been the experience in Tendring.

The Council has a statutory duty as the local housing authority to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Homelessness applications</b>
2013/14	87
2014/15	137
015/16	159
2016/17	288
2017/18	308

Despite the extra advice and duties brought in by the Homelessness Reduction Act, the lack of affordable housing and private rented properties mean that the use of temporary accommodation has increased.

In 2018/19 the Council received 704 homelessness applications which is a significant increase from previous years. The main reason for this is the fact that the definition of threatened with homelessness is now triggered at 56 days as opposed to 28 days

For each homelessness application the Council's duty is to assess each applicant's situation and provide a personal housing plan if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The aim of the plan is to help keep the person in their current home or support them to find somewhere else to live. Officers work with the person for up to eight weeks if they are threatened with homelessness and for a further eight weeks once they are homeless. If the person is still homeless after eight weeks, the council will then make a main duty decision which will determine what further help we have to provide. This decision is based on whether they have a priority need and the reasons for which they have become homeless.

The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation at the point in which a person becomes homeless if they have a priority need. This accommodation is provided until they either find settled accommodation or a main duty decision is made. If the main duty decision is that a person has a priority need and is homeless through no fault of their own, then they will have to stay in temporary accommodation until longer-term housing is secured.

In 2018/19 232 households were placed in emergency accommodation with the average time spent in the accommodation being 5.2 weeks. The longest period of time a household had to stay in emergency accommodation was 17.8 weeks.

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of placements</b>	<b>Average no. of days in placement</b>
2013/14	44	17
2014/15	57	24
2015/16	91	23
2016/17	154	24
2017/18	182	31
2018/19	232	37

In previous years it was possible to assist applicants to find alternative accommodation before they actually became homeless and therefore not so many were placed in temporary accommodation.

It is becoming more difficult to gain access to the private rented sector as a significant number of landlords are refusing to house people on benefits or require guarantors and rent in advance. This makes preventing people becoming homeless by arranging alternative accommodation in the private rented sector challenging. The impact of welfare reform changes, the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance rates and the roll-out of Universal Credit are seeing more people threatened with homelessness.

The Council's spending on using private sector properties for temporary accommodation provision has been rising steadily over recent years. The Council does not have any control over the number of households presenting as homeless and has a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation in many cases. This type of accommodation is usually provided via local bed and breakfast establishments and through block booking arrangements with two property owners in Clacton. In 2018/19 the Council spent £459,265 on temporary accommodation, which is met through the General Fund.

One of the block booking arrangements provides 14 rooms and costs £184,000 per annum. This accommodation is mainly for single people/couples and only has 2 family rooms. We are therefore still reliant on bed and breakfast establishments to provide temporary accommodation for families. This block booking arrangement is located in central Clacton and as such having an offer outside of Clacton for some client groups may be very advantageous e.g. someone fleeing domestic violence. A proposal to bring Spendells House in Walton back into use as a dedicated council run temporary accommodation unit will be brought to Cabinet next month for approval.

The long term housing outcomes for all households remains the same, with the use of private rented accommodation being the main option. The cost of this to the Council is a one off payment between £0 - £1825 to assist with rent in advance and a deposit where needed. Often this can be funded through the Discretionary Housing Payment fund and therefore at no cost to the Council.

The strategy sets out the measures the Council will take to reduce dependency on nightly-paid accommodation. The Council has received an up-lift in the financial support it receives from the MHCLG since April 2017. In April 2020, the Council was awarded £666,189 in Homelessness Support Grant for this financial year, however this funding is awarded on an annual basis with no indication as to the funding award in future years.

### ***Funding to Reduce Rough Sleeping.***

Following a successful bid to the MHCLG, funding is now in place to procure a new rough sleeping outreach service for the district and funding has been separately approved by Full Council to recruit a Housing Early Intervention Officer on a three year fixed-term contract to support households with critical needs facing homelessness.

### **Risk**

This strategy is being adopted at a time when the country is coping with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Housing Solutions Team has had to change its working practices to meet this new challenge and the Council is currently accommodating households it would not normally owe a duty to in order to minimise health risks to those individuals and wider society. The Government has brought in measures to postpone evictions and repossessions during this time but it is very likely that there will be an increase in homelessness once these restrictions are lifted and households face homelessness because of reduced incomes. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Parliamentary Committee has launched an

inquiry into the impact of Covid-19 on homelessness and the private rented sector and will look at what might be needed post-lockdown and what further support is required for the homeless and private tenants. The Housing Solutions Team will review the lessons learned from the pandemic and report the findings to the new Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Forum for the District.

## **LEGAL**

Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002 requires the Council to carry out a review of homelessness in the District and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based upon the conclusions of that review and predicted future levels of homelessness in the district. The Council is required to comply with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) in assessing, preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the District.

## **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder/Equality and Diversity/Health Inequalities/Consultation/Public Engagement

### **Crime and Disorder**

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping is likely to reduce incidents of crime and disorder in the District. The strategy sets out how the Council can educate the wider community on homelessness issues and commits to work with the Clacton Town Centre Group to tackle rough sleeping, begging and street drinking in Clacton. Lessons learned from this work will support similar work in other towns in the District.

### **Equality and Diversity**

The strategy promotes a holistic approach to tackling homelessness in the District and emphasises the need to work with the most vulnerable members of our community, especially assisting households to maintain tenancies and identifying those most at risk of losing a tenancy.

### **Health Inequalities**

Homelessness and rough sleeping can have a catastrophic impact on the health and well-being of the individuals affected and our communities. Reducing homelessness and rough sleeping will assist the Council in improving the health and well-being of our communities and improve the lives of our most vulnerable households.

### **Ward**

All wards are covered

### **Consultation and Public Engagement**

In July 2019, the Council hosted a homelessness stakeholder event at Clacton Town Hall which was attended by representatives from central and local Government and the voluntary sector. Over 25 people attended the event and the feedback received from colleagues at the event helped to shape the four priorities in the strategy.

The strategy went out to wider public consultation in December 2019 and the consultation period was extended to allow presentations to community groups. The responses received were mainly positive and supported the priorities identified in the strategy.

The draft Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy was presented to the Community Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020. The

Committee recommended to Cabinet that they have the opportunity to scrutinise the strategy and make recommendations to the Portfolio Holder as necessary.

### **PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Homelessness Reduction & Rough Sleeping Strategy has been drafted following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. This has been the most significant change to homelessness administration and legislation since the first homelessness legislation was passed in 1977. This strategy has been developed to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the district at a time when homelessness has been increasing locally and nationally with associated social and financial costs.

The strategy sets out the national and local strategic setting for homelessness and the causes and demographics of homelessness in the District. It sets out the challenges the Council faces in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and how homelessness is an issue that needs to be tackled in partnership with other agencies. The Council, as a community leader, can facilitate earlier prevention and better partnership working.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR DECISION**

None

#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024